

From Mosques to *Khanqahs*: The Origins and Rise of Sufi Institutions

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Abstract. This paper examines the evolution of Sufi institutions from the realm of the mosque institutions to the independent and self-governing bodies and establishments that cater to the needs of the ever-proliferating Sufi community. The relationship between Sufi institutions and other Islamic socio-political, educational and religious institutions is also discussed. The focus of the paper is, first, on the historical needs of the Sufi, which called for the creation of self-governing Sufi institutions. This examination is followed by a discussion of the Sufi notion of travel and how this important Sufi tradition facilitated the gradual emergence of Sufi institutions. Then, the emergence of Sufi institutions from simple *duwayrahs* (small houses or convents) to *ribats* and multipurpose *khanqah* complexes is examined.

Keywords and phrases: mosques, Sufism, Sufi institutions, *duwayrahs*, *ribats*, *khanqahs*

The Evolution of Sufi Needs for Independent Institutions

Just as it is almost impossible to study the formation and rise of Sufism outside the domain of the study of the advent and spread of the Islamic message, it is likewise nearly impossible to study the genesis and growth of Sufi institutions outside the ambit of the study of the origins and rise of Islamic institutions. At first, when Sufism had yet to assert itself as a distinctive mode of submission and worship, the mosque institution was its sole home. The word *sufi* (Sufi) might have been coined around the 2nd AH/8th CE century. The word referred to some ascetics and hermits who wore wool as opposed to other ascetics and devout men from the majority of Muslims who wore linen and cotton (Karamustafa 2007). However, the designations *tasawwuf* and *sufi* did not become common until the first half of the 3rd AH/9th CE century, when they came to be applied to the Muslim ascetics and recluses in Iraq, Syria and, possibly, Egypt. If similar words and expressions were in use earlier, it must have been sheer coincidence and those terms must have meant something else. Thus, the lines demarcating the world of Sufism and the Sufis became clearly drawn around the first half of the 3rd AH/9th CE century. There was no need for the establishment of independent Sufi institutions. Mosque institutions, which functioned as inclusive and dynamic community development centres, were sufficient. Sufism had yet to transform itself from a pioneering mode of piety to an established pietistic tradition

(Karamustafa 2007). Early Sufi masters taught in mosques, similar to other mainstream Islamic scholars who taught Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), exegesis (*tafsir*) of the Qur'an, the Prophet's *Sunnah* and theology in mosques. In fact, those early Sufi masters were regarded as genuine members of Islamic mainstream scholarship and their teachings were integral to the thriving Islamic epistemology. The foundation of authentic Sufi theorising based on the Qur'an and *Sunnah* meant that their views were widely accepted and that their knowledge of other religious sciences was creditable. Hence, many Sufis were also known as scholars of jurisprudence, Qur'anic exegesis, the *Sunnah* and theology. Many also excelled in preaching in mosques because their embrace of authentic Sufism, which implied both theory and practice, actively involved them in enjoining good and forbidding evil. As a result, their followers and admirers were numerous. Virtually living in mosques was a norm for some Sufis, like Abdullah al-Murta'ish (d. 329 AH/940 CE). Thus, a Sufi once advised that an aspiring Sufi should strive to be a guest of some mosque every night (al-Qushayri 1990). Muhammad bin Isma'il al-Farghani, a Sufi whose identifying mark was displaying wealth in poverty and who regarded poverty as the finest thing, did not own a house. He lived in mosques. Ibrahim bin Adham (d. 161 AH/778 CE) also used to sleep in mosques (Ibn al-Mulaqqan 1998).

However, exclusive Sufi concepts and the ways and techniques for practicing and teaching them evolved and the followers and students of Sufism were increasing. Therefore, the need to extend the physical institutional locus of Sufism beyond the precincts of the mosque institution was growing, albeit without abandoning or diminishing the role of the mosque and its significance. Hence, many early Sufi masters operated in their houses and even their shops. Some fancied the wilderness. A need for travel and the exchange of ideas was felt too, as was a need for lodging while traveling and visiting Sufis.

As an illustration, upon his conversion to Sufism, Dawud bin Nasir al-Ta'i (d. 165 AH/781 CE) is said to have secluded himself in his house while he began to practice ascetic austerities and perform acts of devotion. Similarly, Ali bin Sahl al-Asbahani (d. 253 AH/867 CE), one of al-Junayd al-Baghdadi's contemporaries, used to leave his house only to perform the Friday or *Jumu'ah* Prayer and the five daily prayers in congregation. He said that if it were not for those prayers that he had to perform in mosques, he would have permanently locked himself inside his house (Ibn al-Mulaqqan 1998). Likewise, al-Junayd al-Baghdadi (d. 297 AH/910 CE) would come every day to his shop, close its door and perform four hundred prayer units (*rak'ah*). He would then return to his house. Another example is Ahmad Muhammad al-Nuri (d. 295 AH/908 CE), a Sufi master from Baghdad and one of al-Junayd's contemporaries. It is said that he used to leave his house every day carrying some bread with him and he would give out this bread as alms along his way. He would then enter the mosque and pray until around noon. He

would then leave the mosque, open his shop and fast. His family thought that he ate at the bazaar, while the people of the bazaar thought that he ate at home. He maintained this practice for 20 years. It is no wonder, then, that the same Ahmad Muhammad al-Nuri defined Sufism as "the abandonment of everything that pleases the soul" (al-Qushayri 1990).

What is apparent from the above is that the Sufis increasingly felt not as much alienated from other Muslims as close to and intimate with, each other, both in terms of religious rites and mere socialisation. As a result, an urgent need for independent Sufi institutions, firstly on a part-time and later on a full-time basis, was felt. Afterward, when independent Sufi institutions materialised, it then became possible for the Sufis to evolve a system of associations, or orders and to categorise themselves into *tariqahs* and fellowships organised around and named for the "way" or "path" of given masters. The latter and arguably most decisive, stage in the evolution of the Sufi way started to take place from the 6th AH/12th CE century onwards.

Sufism and the Notion of Travel

To intensify and widen the maturing Sufi mission, multiplying and diversifying its audience as well as the perspectives and modes of delivery, many Sufis had a fondness for travel and strongly recommended the same to their brethren. The travels of many Sufis and their rather exaggerated proselytising exploits are well documented. So important was the matter that in some Sufi manuals and epistles, a special section for travel and its rules and guidelines was designated, such as in the one composed by Abu al-Qasim al-Qushayri (d. 465 AH/1072 CE).

Abu Nasr al-Siraj al-Tusi (d. 378 AH/988 CE) (n.d.) also dedicated a section in his *Kitab al-Luma'* to Sufi manners in travel, highlighting therein the Sufis' main reasons, objectives and etiquette as regards travel. He used the opportunity to criticise those who travel extensively, who boast of the number of Sheikhs they have met and who deem themselves to therefore be in a privileged position. They are wrong, Abu Nasr al-Siraj al-Tusi concluded, because the purpose of travel is moral improvement devoid of all potential corporal or spiritual vices.

For Shihab al-Din Umar al-Suhrawardi (d. 632 AH/1234 CE) (1984), furthermore, travel for legitimate spiritual and educational purposes is highly recommended. Travel subdues refractory lusts and softens hard hearts. Being separated from one's native land, from friends and familiar things and exercising patience and calmness help to stop lust and nature from pursuing their path and lift the hardness from hearts. By subduing lusts, the effect of travel is not less than the effect of religious obligations and rituals. For the safety of his faith, a person should never stay in a place too long.

It appears as though Shihab al-Din Umar al-Suhrawardi was very eloquent and enthusiastic about travel because during his time (he died in 632 AH/1234 CE), Sufi institutions became a norm in most regions of the vast Muslim state and were supported both conceptually and financially by governments. Thus, accommodation and Sufi training, preaching, learning and practicing opportunities, abounded. This situation led Shihab al-Din Umar al-Suhrawardi (1984) to delve into issues such as the customs of travelling Sufis when arriving and alighting at a Sufi institution (*ribat*), the time of the day at which to do so, what to do upon entering, how to greet the permanent dwellers of the place, how long to stay, when and how to meet a sheikh, how to talk, how to leave the place, etc. He even furnished potential traveling Sufis with all the necessary *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) solutions and directives relating to travel, such as shortening and combining prayers, dry ablution (*tayammum*), the complete ablution (*ghusl*), wiping over socks, slippers or shoes while taking ablution (*wudhu'*), prayer (*salah*) under different circumstances including a state of riding an animal, purification by different available means, fasting (*siyam*), etc.

If one considers the time frame required for Sufi institutions to completely evolve and for their signature roles and functions to diversify, one can comprehend why Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali (d. 505 AH/1111 CE), while residing two years in Damascus, lived a solitary life in the great Umayyad mosque and not somewhere in a Sufi institution. He was in the habit of spending his days on the minaret after closing the door behind him. From thence, he proceeded to Jerusalem where, again, every day he secluded himself in the sanctuary of Dome of the Rock, a segment of *al-Masjid al-Aqsa*. Needless to say, the sole goal of Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali's travels was spiritual retirement, meditation and devout exercises. He confessed that he wanted only self-improvement, discipline and purification of the heart by prayer by going through the form of devotion that the Sufis had taught him (al-Ghazzali 1992). It stands to reason that in his travels, Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali did not reside in Sufi institutions because the Sufis in Syria at that time were yet to become a pervasive and full-fledged institutions; this did not happen until a century or so later. In addition, Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali lived in mosques because he, particularly at the beginning of his epic journeys, was yet to become a Sufi *par excellence*. When he set off from his home in Baghdad to Syria, Jerusalem and finally to Makkah, he did so on account of a spiritual crisis that befell him, which led him to abandon his successful scholarly career and leave Baghdad on the pretext of going on pilgrimage to Makkah. Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali, during the spell in question, was a true Sufi in the making. He thus was yet to undertake a journey from the realm of the mosque institution to the realms of Sufi institutions; that did not happen until he returned to Baghdad and then to his birthplace, the city of Tus in Iran.

The Concept of *Duwayrah*

The first instance of an independent Sufi institution was the establishment of a Sufi *duwayrah* (small house or convent) by some followers of the early Sufi master Abd al-Wahid bin Zayd (d. 150 AH/767 CE). Abd al-Wahid bin Zayd lived in Basrah, where for some time, he accompanied and studied with al-Hasan al-Basri (d. 110 AH/728 CE). During Abd al-Wahid bin Zayd's time, Basrah enjoyed a reputation as a place where people exaggerated such Sufi-oriented concepts as asceticism, worship, love for and fear of God, etc. (Ibn Taymiyah 2006). Basrah is thus regarded as the birthplace of Sufism. Abd al-Wahid bin Zayd himself was known for his tenacity in worship and asceticism. He was a great preacher who used to preach in mosques. He travelled extensively and often participated in holy wars (*jihad*) (al-Asfahani 2002).

This first house and some other similar Sufi *duwayrahs*, or little houses or convents, were the antecedents of the true Sufi institutions that started to emerge perhaps less than a century later. These institutions, in all probability, functioned as unpretentious multi-purpose gathering places and shelters for some Sufis and their followers and novices. These institutions also functioned as shelters and hostels for the increasing numbers of traveling and visiting Sufis. Some lodges or cloisters are reported to have been built next to mosques (Karamustafa 2007).

Rabi'ah al-'Adawiyyah, who died in 135 or 185 AH/752 or 801 CE, is also said to have had her own hermitage where in solitude and peace she served God. Apart from her hermitage, she also made use of her house and the vastness of the desert for this purpose. People would visit her both in her house and her hermitage (Attar 2000). Another saintly figure from approximately the same era, Habib al-'Ajami (Attar 2000), is also described as having a private hermitage in which al-Hasan al-Basri, one of his teachers, visited him.

Prior to the existence of some of those little houses, convents and private hermitages in the 2nd AH/9th CE and the beginning of the 3rd AH/9th CE centuries, it is impossible to trace the existence of independent Sufi institutions. This result is expected because Sufism did not exist before then as a recognisable and collective movement and as a specialised genre of Islamic spirituality and worship. When discussing the phenomena of *khanqahs* and other Sufi institutions, al-Maqrizi (1998) reported that it was as early as during the caliphate of Uthman Affan (d. 36 AH/656 CE), the third orthodox caliph, that Zayd bin Sawhan bin Sabrah built the first houses of worship aside from mosques. He did so for a group of destitutes and, most likely, homeless men in Basrah who dedicated all of their time and energy to spiritual work. Because they had neither businesses nor incomes, they needed help. Consequently, Zayd bin Sawhan bin Sabrah built houses for them, designating a person to be in charge of looking

after them and their various needs, such as food, drink, clothing and the like. Caliph Uthman Affan's governor in Basrah, Abdullah Amir (d. 59 AH/678 CE), heard about these men and is said to have attempted to lure them and have closer and more amiable relations with them, but his overtures were snubbed at the initiative of Zayd bin Sawhan bin Sabrah. He argued that these men gave themselves up to devotion and seeking God's pleasure and Paradise, whereas the governor's concerns were completely different. It was feared that the spiritual men's purity could become contaminated by the governor's and his circles' less spiritual and less pure aspects. Therefore, the men were advised to stay put and continue exercising their spiritual works in their "spiritual" shelters.

However, this house in no way should be conceived of as a precursor for subsequent Sufi institutions. Firstly, there was no person called a Sufi nor any activity or set of activities called Sufism at that time. In as much as neither Sufism nor the Sufis existed then, even in an embryonic phase, there could not be any talk of nascent Sufi institutions. Secondly, the primary objective for instituting these houses for needy men of excessive devotion and asceticism was to provide shelter for them and to take care of their basic needs. Those shelters or houses might have later been turned into places for spiritual exercises and works, but this was complementary or auxiliary to their primary functions, which revolved around housing or sheltering those righteous men. There was nothing particularly unusual in this exercise. The men went, perhaps excessively, after their spiritual business and obsessions; someone felt that the men were doing the right thing and, being aware of his social responsibilities and able to afford it, supported them. On the whole, considering the nature of Muslim society at that point of time, this situation in Basrah was not far from a standard procedure; it was not an anomaly. The places in question were essentially private dwellings and the essence of whatever transpired inside them was not different from the essence of what transpired outside them, just as the characters of those men was not different from the characters of other believers.

The Concept of *Ribat*

After *duwayrahs* – and perhaps somewhat concurrently with their existence – one hears about *ribats* as another Sufi institution. *Ribats* were Sufi hospices that functioned as centres for Sufi worship and erudition. These centres temporarily lodged both the regional and the traveling Sufis, as per their needs and the activities inside the structures. In addition, *ribat* cells were also used to house Muslim *du'at* or propagators of Islam (Wan Noor Zeiti 2002). Originally, *ribats* might have been a particular type of Arabic military fortified structure; in the Arabic language, the words *ribat* and *murabatah* signify battles against the enemy and the manning of Muslim outposts to stop enemy incursions inside Muslim territories. The Qur'an urges Muslims to "...endure and surpass your

enemies in endurance and guard the frontiers of the Islamic nation (*rabitū; ribat*); and keep fearing Allah, hoping that you may succeed" (Ali Imran 3:200). The Prophet (PBUH) also said that a day of *ribat* in the cause of Allah is better than this life and all that is in it.

Ribat thus implies the constant struggle for self-purification and spiritual fulfilment. It also implies patiently and steadfastly confronting enemies, both physical and spiritual and both inner and outer. The Sufis might have used the word *ribat* as a name for one of their nascent institutions so as to feature the quintessence of their cause as well as the pure nature and extent of their struggle against all types of evil and its incarnates. *Ribats* were places of spiritual *jihad* or holy war. Moreover, the Sufis' purpose in utilising *ribats* as existing military fortified structures might have been two-fold: to actively participate in ongoing military expeditions and to use and perhaps prolong, their stay to practice and preach their Sufi tenets. Equally plausible is the proposition that some abandoned *ribats* may have been reconditioned by the Sufis and then used for their own institutions while retaining the structures' original name. Our inferences are based on the established truths that many Sufis throughout Muslim history actively participated in numerous military expeditions (al-Sallabi 2008). It is an underlying Sufi precept that *jihad* (holy war) is of two types: the external one waged against the infidels and the internal one waged against one's base soul and Satan, the latter being greater. Each form of *jihad* involves its spoils of war.

Indeed, the two notions: *jihad*, both physical and spiritual and Sufism cannot be separated. This relationship with the *jihad* became palpable during the embryonic stages of Sufism and the various aspects of this synthesis can easily be found in the lives of many members of the Sufi vanguard. For instance, Ibrahim Adham, having settled in Syria on the border with Byzantium, took part in several naval and land expeditions, on the last of which he died. He participated in these expeditions despite his developing Sufi precepts, which emphasised extreme asceticism, seclusion, constant meditation, contrition, sadness, divine friendship and gnosis (Knysh 2000; al-Sulami 2003). Next, Abdullah bin al-Mubarak (d. 181 AH/797 CE) is also credited with great feats of arms in the holy war against the Byzantine Christians. Although his later biographers stressed his exemplary piety and abstinence from worldly delights, he was primarily famous for his active *jihad* and superior physical strength. "These qualities made him a formidable warrior and a popular military leader" (Knysh 2000). Lastly, it has been narrated that Shaiq al-Balkhi (d. 194 AH/810 CE), a Khorosani devotee reputed to be an ardent jihadist, even resided in a fortified *ribat* in a city in eastern Iran, which was manned by volunteers fighting against the pagan Turks of central Asia. In the end, he was killed in action during a military expedition (Knysh 2000; Ibn al-Mulaqqan 1998).

Later, in approximately the 3rd AH/9th CE century, some specialised *ribat* complexes were built for the Sufis, serving exclusively as Sufi worship and learning centres. The name *ribat* was still preserved and was given to these newly erected Sufi institutions because the word's etymology embodied the substance of the Sufi struggle and purpose. Maylyuda Yusupova (1999), in her paper entitled *Evolution of Architecture of the Sufi Complexes in Bukhara*, wrote that in the 3rd AH/9th CE century, special *ribats* were built in Central Asia for Sufi followers. She mentioned the names of several of these in Samarkand. It is also possible that *ribats* were built by the Samanids in their capital at Bukhara, but there is no concrete evidence for this (Yusupova 1999).

The earliest reference to the concept of *ribat* as a Sufi institution is provided by Abu al-Qasim al-Qushayri (1990) in relation to Abu Yazid al-Bistami, who died in 261 AH/875 CE. Abu Yazid al-Bistami is reported to have gone one night to a *ribat* to recollect God's name on one of the walls of that *ribat*. He stayed there until dawn without uttering a word. When asked why, he answered: "(While there), there had passed through my mind a (rude) word that I once uttered in my childhood and I was ashamed to mention God – may He be blessed and exalted" (al-Qushayri 1990). A reference is also made to a famous early *ribat* in Abbadan, an island in the mouth of *Shatt al-Arab* that was frequented by early Sufis and ascetics, in which Sahl al-Tustari (d. 283 AH/896 CE), an eminent early Sufi theorist and exegete from Basrah (Al-Qushayri 1990), engaged in arduous ascetic exercises. *Ribats* as fortified military edifices wherein some Sufis resided together with other fighting volunteers definitely existed much earlier than the exclusive Sufi *ribats* that we are referring to at this juncture.

Ribats continued to exist throughout the subsequent centuries. Both their presence and importance did not appear to dwindle even after the rapid rise and spread of *khanqahs* as more specialised and sophisticated Sufi religious and educational institutions in the 4th, 5th and 6th AH/ 10th, 11th and 12th CE centuries. Abu Ali al-Daqqaq (d. 412 AH/1021 CE), a teacher of Abu al-Qasim al-Qushayri, once said that renunciation is when a person gives up this world as it is and does not say "I will build a *ribat* or construct a mosque" (Al-Qushayri 1990). Moreover, Abu Nasr Abd al-Rahim (d. 514 AH/1120 CE), a son of Abu al-Qasim al-Qushayri, is said to have preached both in a *ribat* and a *madrasah* or school, as we will see later (Ibn al-Mulaqqan 1998). *Ribats* as Sufi hospices have been mentioned as late as the 7th, 8th and 9th AH/ 13th, 14th and 15th CE centuries. Ibn Jubayr (d. 614 AH/1217 CE) (1981) mentioned them, together with *khanqahs*, in his travel memoirs as a remarkable sight he witnessed in Damascus. Al-Maqrizi (1998), who died in 845 AH/1441 CE, also mentioned at least twelve *ribats* that are featured permanently in the urban morphology of Cairo together with other Sufi institutions. Shihab al-Din Umar al-Suhrawardi (1984) spoke at length in his book *'Awarif al-Ma'arif* about Sufi institutions and how a Sufi ought

to behave when entering, while inside and when leaving them. However, the author used only the term *ribat* in his discourses. Although he died in the 7th AH/13th century, he did not mention *khanqah*, or any other name, for Sufi institutions.

Institutional Ideological Harmony between Sufi Institutions and Mosques

Following our discussion on the phenomenon of *ribat* and before discussing the concept of *khanqah*, a small digression must be made. In one of the above referenced accounts, Abu Ali al-Daqqaq mentioned that mosques together with *ribat* demonstrated the uninterrupted importance of the mosque in the lives, practices and teachings of the Sufis, notwithstanding the development and independence of their own institutions. Although the mosque and Sufi institutions were physically separated, they were spiritually united, working together and supporting the same vision, objectives and goals. With only a few exceptions, ideological harmony, rather than dichotomy, presided over the process of institutional decentralisation in Muslim society. This harmonious and mutually respectful and supportive relationship between the mosques and Sufi institutions and between the people representing both poles of the Islamic presence, was always a norm whenever and wherever authentic Sufism and mainstream Islamic orthodoxy coexisted. In another illustration of this relationship, it is narrated that Sufi Ali b. Ahmad al-Bushanji (d. 348 AH/959 CE), despite building a *khanqah* in Nishapur, still frequented and stayed in mosques and observed seclusion (Ibn al-Mulaqqan 1998) .

Indeed, neglecting mosques and failing to perform the *Jumu'ah* Prayer and other congregational prayers in them, due to some substitute inventions accommodated by Sufi institutions, is a sign of pseudo-Sufism. According to Ibn Ajibah (d. 1224 AH/1809 CE), a Sufi exegete, one of these substitute inventions is an *arba'in* invention, according to which a Sufi vowed to isolate himself in a Sufi cloister for forty days, intending to worship God there alone. Consequently, he misses performing *Jumu'ah* and other congregational prayers in mosques. Some Sufis thought that this action was virtuous, but it was following in the footsteps of Satan. The same Sufi exegete, Ibn Ajibah said that Islam's "monasticism", which according to the Prophet (PBUH) implies comprehensive *jihad* (struggle) in the cause of Allah, is in the orbs of both mosques and Sufi institutions. This statement implies interacting with and guiding people principally in those two types of institutions, rather than utter withdrawal and seclusion in mountains, caves or deserts.

In the same context, it is noteworthy that the earliest books and epistles on Sufi culture and education, which were meant primarily for Sufi disciples (*murids*) and Sufi followers in general, such as Abu Talib al-Makki's (d. 386 AH/996 CE)

Qut al-Qulub and Abu Abdullah al-Harith al-Muhasibi's (d. 243 AH/857 CE) *al-Ri'ayah li Huquq Allah*, did not refer to the then growing phenomenon of Sufi institutions, but they did make regular references to the mosque institution, emphasising its unrivalled importance in the spiritual and intellectual development of Sufi disciples (*murids*) (al-Makki 1997; al-Muhasibi, 1985). The message was very clear: come what may, the mosque institution could never be overlooked or eclipsed by any other social or religious institution. The mosque is the most important institution in Islam; everything else comes second. More or less, the same holds true concerning the contents of other books and epistles written around the same time, such as *Kitab al-Luma'* by Abu Nasr al-Siraj al-Tusi and *al-Risalah al-Qushayriyyah* by Abu al-Qasim al-Qushayri. When Shihab al-Din Umar al-Suhrawardi (1984) discoursed about the Sufi ethics pertaining to travel and entering a city, he insisted that upon entering a city, a Sufi must go to a mosque first and pray two *rak'ahs*, or units of prayer, in it. It is even better if he goes to a city's central mosque (*jami'*) for this purpose. Only then should a Sufi proceed to a *ribat* or any other available Sufi institution. For Shihab al-Din Umar al-Suhrawardi, this sequence is a *sunnah* (a practice of the Prophet [PBUH]) because whenever the Prophet (PBUH) returned from a journey, he would go to his mosque first. After performing a short prayer of two *rak'ahs* or units there, he would go to his house next. However, given that a traveling Sufi has no house in the cities he visits, his house becomes a *ribat* or any other Sufi institution in those cities. Thus, after a mosque, a Sufi's next station ought always to be a Sufi institution, which is his house.

Moreover, other examples of institutional harmony between authentic Sufism and its institutions and other Muslim social, educational and religious institutions can be seen in both Abu al-Qasim al-Qushayri and Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali. At some point in their energetic lives, these men preached and taught in both government sponsored establishments and Sufi institutions, some of which in their respective eras (5th and early 6th AH/11th and 12th CE centuries) might also have been, at least partly, government sponsored. Surely, when Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali taught in the *Nizamiya* school in Baghdad and when Abu al-Qasim al-Qushayri held *hadith* (the Prophet's tradition) sessions at the palace of Abbasid caliph al-Qa'im (d. 467 AH/1074 CE) in Baghdad, their audiences must have been numerous and wide-ranging, including government officials, Sufis and the common herd of Muslims. Furthermore, in 392 AH/1001 CE, a Shafi'i *madrasah* or school was founded for Abu al-Qasim al-Qushayri's Sufi master and father-in-law, Abu Ali al-Daqqaq. Al-Qushayri later took it over and it came to be known as *al-Qushayri madrasah*. Abu Ali al-Daqqaq, Abu al-Qasim al-Qushayri and one of the latter's sons were all buried there (Malamud 2008). Abu Nasr Abd al-Rahim, another son of Abu al-Qasim al-Qushayri, who was not renowned as a Sufi, but rather as a theologian, is reported to have preached in both a government *madrasah* and a Sufi institution (*ribat*) (Ibn al-Mulaqqan 1998). Abdul Qadir al-Jilani (d. 561

AH/1166 CE), the founding father of the *Qadiriyyah* Sufi order, is also reported to have taught in a Hanbali *madrasah* in Baghdad, to which a Sufi hospice was later added for him and his large family (Knysh 2000). Abu al-Najib Abd al-Qahir al-Suhrawardi (d. 563 AH/1168 CE), with whom the emergence of the great Suhrawardiya Sufi order or brotherhood is associated, is also reputed to have combined both academic and Sufi careers. He taught in the *Nizamiya* school in Baghdad as well as in his own *madrasah*, which was situated next to his Sufi lodge, also in Baghdad. He taught jurisprudence, *hadith* (the Prophet's tradition) and Sufism (Knysh 2000).

The Concept of *Khanqah*

Finally, sometime after the establishment of *ribats*, the *khanqah* started to emerge as a new and the most recognisable Sufi religious and educational institution. Although *ribats* and to a lesser extent *duwayrahs*, still existed, the emergence of *khanqahs* eclipsed them all: the emergence of *khanqahs* both coincided with and was spurred by a favourable socio-political climate. Furthermore, the evolution of Sufi institutions from mosques and *duwayrahs* to *ribats* and then *khanqahs* followed some logic and was spontaneous. *Ribats* and, to a smaller degree, *duwayrahs* were mere shelters for Sufis, where they resided and where some basic and perhaps *ad hoc* worship, ascetic and learning activities were conducted. As al-Maqrizi (1998) remarked, "Every community has its home (dwelling). The home (dwelling) of the Sufi community is the *ribat*". The same idiom has been ascribed to Shihab al-Din Umar al-Suhrawardi (1984) as well. *Khanqahs*, however, are Sufi complexes that still housed Sufis, but now with more sophisticated and elaborate worship, ascetic, socialisation and learning activities. The Sufis were coming closer to grouping themselves into orders and fraternities (*tariqah*), which necessitated additional logistical, managerial, organisational and functional support and rethinking. Thus, in some places, *ribats* simply merged with *khanqahs*, while in other places they existed separately, often next to each other, serving in their different capacities the growing interests of Sufism and the Sufi fraternity. When existing together, it appears as though *khanqahs* functioned as worship, learning and socialising centres, whereas *ribats* functioned mainly as hostels. As an illustration, while describing the *Khanqah* of a Mamluki Sultan Ruknuddin Baybars al-Jashankir (d. 709 AH/1309 CE) in Cairo, which was the most splendid *khanqah* in Cairo, al-Maqrizi (1998) wrote that the Sultan built a massive *ribat* next to it, to which one could go from inside the *khanqah*. Ibn Jubayr (1981) also spoke of *ribats* and *khanqahs* as separate institutions in Damascus. But at one point, he commented that *ribats* were called *khanqahs* and were numerous in Damascus. Surely, these accounts only buttress our reflection that the two institutions sometimes merged and were called *khanqahs*, sometimes, though rarely, stood and operated separately and at still other times

were integrated into a Sufi complex while retaining their respective identities. In the last scenario, *ribats* normally played a supplementary role to *khanqahs*.

It follows that subsequent to the full institutionalisation of *khanqahs*, it was rare for an entire Sufi complex to be called just a *ribat*. Only smaller, some perhaps private, Sufi lodges with less convoluted and methodical ascetic and educational procedures and curricula in certain regions were still referred to thus. An example is the lodge in which Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali retired and taught Sufism after his first stint as a *Nizamiya* school professor and after completing his *magnum opus*, *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*, following a substantial period of withdrawal and isolation. Abu al-Fida' Ibn Kathir (1985) called Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali's Sufi lodge a *ribat*, adding that large multitudes of people on a daily basis thronged to it to listen to Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali. As mentioned earlier, after his conversion to Sufism, Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali also taught in a government sponsored school, apart from teaching in his relatively small *ribat*. According to Abu al-Fida' Ibn Kathir (1985), some of the earliest Saljuqi Sufi institutions constructed by the Saljuqi rulers and donated to the Sufis, were also termed as *ribats* (Ibn Kathir 1985). At any rate, the terms *ribat* and *khanqah* were not consistently interchanged. The matter varied from one region to another depending on how profoundly Sufism and Sufi institutions took root and how widely they were represented in those regions.

Just like *ribats*, it is likewise possible that after the emergence of the *khanqah* system, whatever survived of the notion of *duwayrah*, the prototype Sufi institution, either fully integrated itself into the *khanqah* system or functioned independently but still as a supportive component or an annex. Siraj al-Din 'Umar al-Misri Ibn al-Mulaqqan (d. 804 AH/1401 CE) mentioned in his book on the categories of the Sufis, or the friends of Allah, *Tabaqat al-Awliya'* (1998), that Muhammad al-Husayn al-Naysaburi, a Sufi master from Nishapur who died in 412 AH/1021 CE, bequeathed a *duwayrah* in his hometown to his followers. However, it appears as though this bequest was not just a *duwayrah* in a classical sense of the word. It was more than that; it might have been part of a larger Sufi multiplex, as the author revealed that the grave of the mentioned Sufi master was patronised for the sake of seeking blessings. The grave should not have been far away from the *duwayrah*, nor should it have stood alone and bare, taking into account some Sufi, as well as ordinary people's, beliefs and customs as regards venerating the graves of certain sheikhs and saints; these beliefs were firmly established at the time of the aforementioned author. In addition, the first and one of the most prominent and influential *khanqahs* in Egypt, established by Salahuddin al-Ayyubi (d. 590 AH/1193 CE), was also called a Sufi *Duwayrah* (Al-Maqrizi 1998).

The term *khanqah* is made up of two Persian words *khana-gah* and means "a place of residence" for the Sufis, a "place at the table" or a "place of recitation". This word is used in Persian regions and also in Arab regions such as Syria, Iraq and Egypt (Wan Noor Zeiti 2002). A typical *khanqah* was a self-reliant hostel, a meeting and socialisation place, a *madrasah* or school and, to some extent, a mosque, with all of the necessary annexes, services, amenities and facilities. A majority of *khanqahs* were sponsored by governments, especially in the Saljuqi, Ayyubid, Mamluki and Ottoman states. Some *khanqahs*' major benefactors were rich individuals. Others were financially backed by pious donations from the public. The earliest reference to a *khanqah* is given in relation to a Sufi named Abu Turab 'Askar al-Nakhshabi who died in 245 AH/859 CE. He is reported to have said once to his companions: "He who wears patched rags, is begging (for alms); he who sits in the *khanqah* or in the mosque, is begging; and he who reads aloud the Qur'anic text from the book for people to hear is also a beggar" (al-Qushayri 1990). As another example of early *khanqahs* during the early 4th AH/10th CE century, it is reported that a Sufi, Ali bin Ahmad al-Bushanji (d. 348 AH/959 CE), built a *khanqah* in Nishapur, frequented and stayed in mosques and observed seclusion (Ibn al-Mulaqqan 1998).

There are a few other 4th AH/10th CE century references to the existence of *khanqahs*, such as the one given by Ibn al-Nadim (d. 388 AH/998 CE) in his book *al-Fihrist*, another by an anonymous author in a book called *Hudud al-'Alam* written in Guzgan in 372 AH/982 CE and yet another provided by al-Maqdisi (d. 380 AH/990 CE). Al-Maqdisi's account serves as evidence that *khanqahs* were an exclusive institution of the Karramiyyah, a group of generally pseudo and heterodox Sufis (al-Baghdadi, n.d.) who flourished in Khurasan, Samarqand, Jurjan and Transoxania as well as Jerusalem (Wan Noor Zeiti 2002; Tabbaa 2001). Regarding the *khanqahs* of the Karramiyyah, Alexander Knysh (2000) believes that towards the end of the 4th AH/early 11th CE and the early 5th AH/11th CE centuries, they were scattered across the Persian countryside serving as centres of instruction and ascetic life. Those *khanqahs*, furthermore, might have been the prototypes of the subsequent Sufi lodges that mushroomed in the eastern parts of the Muslim world from the 6th AH/12th CE century onward. To digress a bit, the Karramiyyah were a religious movement that combined theological beliefs and Sufi practices. They proselytised the common people and converted them to Islam. They appear to have been the first to raise the initial Sufi elements of collective organisation into a full-scale movement. They developed a system of *khanqahs* that served as bases for missionary activities. "This organized religious mission had widespread success among the common people but was bitterly opposed by the Muslim schools of law, other Sufis and eventually by the Saljuq state authorities" (Lapidus 1992).

In the 5th and 6th AH/11th and 12th CE centuries, the *khanqah* institution was in its heyday for primarily two reasons. Firstly, in the 5th AH/11th CE century, the proliferation of *khanqahs* denoted a natural phase in the centuries-old evolution of Sufism and its institutions. Secondly, numerous social, political and intellectual developments and changes were sweeping across the Muslim lands. Those changes proved to be at once pivotal and beneficial for the subsequent history of Sufism. This was a time when Sufism as a massive movement was spreading from its foremost urban nucleuses in Iraq, Khurasan, Transoxania and, to some extent, Syria. Some of the major urban centres of Sufism were Baghdad, Basrah and Nishapur. It appears as though there was no Muslim territory in which Sufism did not start spreading its wings and was not on the rise, in some places more and in other places less. Most of the prominent Sufis of the time were closely connected, keeping in touch with one another through travel and written correspondence (Karamustafa 2007). In addition, they were further interrelated and united by the fact that they learned from and shared the same intellectual and spiritual legacies of several former Sufi masters, such as al-Junayd al-Baghdadi, Sahl al-Tustari and Abu Yazid al-Bistami, to name a few. Certainly, al-Junayd al-Baghdadi with his teachings and enormous number of disciples surpassed every other Sufi master of his epoch. So towering was his personality and so colossal was his influence in the sphere of Sufism, that he was rightly labelled as the master (*sayyid*) of the Sufi community and their imam or leader. As a result of those developments, the creation of *khanqah* centres that functioned as multi-purpose gathering places, many of which included areas reserved for prayer, religious schools and residential quarters for students, guests, pilgrims and travellers, increased. Later, some of these *khanqah* centres even included the shrines of certain Sufi masters and saints. Hence, most of the leading Sufi figures of the 5th AH/11th CE century are said to have had connections with one or more *khanqahs*. Some of those Sufi personalities were Abu Ali al-Daqqaq, Abu Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami (d. 412 AH/1021 CE), Abu Sa'id bin Abi al-Khayr (d. 440 AH/1049 CE), al-Hujwiri (d. 463 AH/1071 CE), Abu al-Qasim al-Qushayri and many others (Wan Noor Zeiti 2002; Trimmingham 1971).

Furthermore, the *khanqah* institution during the mentioned timeframe was in its heyday. From the 6th AH/12th CE century onward, Sufi life was increasingly cultivated in Sufi associations or orders (*tariqah*, pl. *uruq*), many of which are still active today. In fact, if Islamic Sufism is mentioned today, the Sufi orders, their specialised institutions and particular customs and rituals are the first aspects to come to mind. In addition, the grand masters of *tariqah* Sufism lived during this time, such as Abdul Qadir al-Jilani (d. 561 AH/1166 CE), the founding father of the *Qadiriyyah* Sufi order, which with its various branches arguably represents the most recognised *tariqah*; Abu al-Najib Abd al-Qahir al-Suhrawardi (d. 563 AH/1168 CE), who is associated with the emergence of the *Suhrawardiya* brotherhood; and Shihab al-Din Umar al-Suhrawardi (d. 632

AH/1234 CE), who was Abu al-Najib Abd al-Qahir al-Suhrawardi's nephew and who wrote a famous book about institutionalised Sufism, *'Awarif al-Ma'arif*. It should also be noted that Abu al-Najib Abd al-Qahir al-Suhrawardi was a disciple of Ahmad al-Ghazzali (d. 520 AH/1126 CE), brother of the celebrated Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali. Furthermore, in the Muslim West, the fortunes of Sufism were inextricably tied with the personality and teachings of Abu al-Hasan Ali al-Shadhili (d. 656 AH/1258 CE). "This *Maghribi* Sufi launched a *tariqah* which gave birth to numerous dynamic ramifications in Egypt and North Africa. Later on, the offshoots of the *al-Shadhiliya tariqah* spread throughout the Islamic world, as far as India and Indonesia" (Knysh 2000).

To this plethora of Sufi masters, we must also add Bahauddin Muhammad Muhammad Naqshband (d. 791 AH/1389 CE), a Sufi master and the founder of the *Naqshbandiya* Sufi order, which thrived in Turkey, Transoxania, Khurasan and India; Najm al-Din Kubra (d. 617 AH/1220 CE) and the *Kubrawiya* Sufi order, as well as Shah Ni'mat Allah Wali (d. 834 AH/1430 CE) and the *Ni'matullahi* Sufi order.

Lastly, this exclusive guild of most distinguished Sufi masters, those who shaped and modelled the Sufi community's future path, would not be complete if such personalities as Ahmad al-Rifa'i (d. 583 AH/1187 CE) and Jalaluddin Muhammad al-Rumi (d. 672 AH/1273 CE) are not mentioned. The former was the founder of *Rifa'iyyah*, a Sufi fraternity found primarily in Egypt and Syria and in Turkey until outlawed in 1925. The *Rifa'iyyah tariqah* was an offshoot of the *Qadiriya* Sufi order established in Basra, Iraq. Jalaluddin Muhammad al-Rumi was the founder of the *Mawlawiyah* Sufi fraternity in Konya, Anatolia. He was a well-known Persian Sufi poet whose popular title *mawlana* (Arabic: "our master") gave the order its name. The order, propagated throughout Anatolia, controlled Konya and environs by the 9th AH/15th CE century and in the 11th AH/17th CE century appeared in Constantinople (Istanbul). European travellers identified the *Mawlawiyah* as dancing (or whirling) dervishes, based on their observations of the order's ritual prayer (*dhikr*), performed spinning on the right foot to the accompaniment of musical instruments (Encyclopaedia Britannica Academic Edition, s.v. "*Mawlawiyah*").

Although mosques and *madrasahs* were never abandoned, the existence of large and more durable *khanqahs* was inevitable and they became a regular and prominent feature of Islamic urbanism, especially from the 5th AH/11th CE century onward. In these *khanqahs*, Sufi masters taught, trained and guided the ever swelling circles of disciples that surrounded them in official sessions. Other social and spiritual markers were concomitantly established, eventually becoming permanent Sufi customs and traditions, such as wearing specially designed Sufi dress and paraphernalia, communal rituals such as the *dhikr* (remembering God)

that are performed in assembly and formulaic prescriptions for spiritual exercises issued by authoritative masters who normally reside fulltime in *khanqahs*. Wide-ranging systems of educational and spiritual exercises and *modus operandi* were developed. Under these circumstances, the legacy of a Sufi master was preserved in works that were either his own dictations to disciples who acted as his scribes or later compilations of notes recorded by disciples during his teaching sessions (Karamustafa 2007).

The rise of the *tariqahs* went through several important phases and with it the rise of Sufi institutions, especially *khanqahs*, because the concept of *khanqah* is the most identifiable with the concept of *tariqah*. At first, the embryonic Sufi orders were housed in austere Sufi lodges and hermitages, wherein the Sufis practiced their rites and engaged in collective and individual worship without being disturbed by the hustle and bustle of everyday life. Gradually, these institutions acquired rigidly fixed rules of fellowship and a complex hierarchical leadership. The teacher-disciple relationship was relatively loose. The disciple (*murid*) often attached himself to several teachers in the hope of benefitting from their spiritual advice and from their varying interpretations of the knowledge pertaining to the Sufi path. But this relationship was set to undergo an important change at the end of the 4th AH/10th century (Knysh 2000; Trimingham 1971). Other Sufi institutions and establishments that functioned as a physical locus of the Sufi life were also set to gradually change and become multifunctional multiplexes as a result. Alexander Knysh (2000) explains the changes in Sufi practice:

The face-to-face instruction in a casual setting that was typical of early Sufism was replaced by a more-or-less formal course that the spiritual master offered simultaneously to a relatively large group of disciples. In some cases, the teacher supported his disciples from his own funds or by means of pious donations. In return, he came to require of his disciples undivided loyalty and could even prohibit them from attending the teaching sessions of other Sufi masters. The training technique of an individual teacher came to be known as his spiritual "way" or "method" (*tariqah*). It was, in essence, a set of rules, rituals and pious formulas, which the sheikh imposed upon his disciples... As time went on, the term *tariqah* came to be applied metonymically to the Sufi discipline and doctrine pursued by the followers of a Sufi master within the framework of a Sufi institution... (Sufi orders or *tariqahs*) were usually named after their founders, although the credit for the shaping of the disciples of a given sheikh into a structured social and religious organism usually went to his immediate successors... Upon completing his training under a renowned master, the novice obtained from his teacher a license to instruct his own disciples (*ijazah*).

Finally, following the emergence and rapid spread of the *khanqah* institution throughout the Muslim world, linguistically it was not called such in every Muslim region, even though most people must have been familiar with the term. The name *khanqah* might have not been as widespread in some provinces of the Muslim West, especially North Africa, where the name for similar Sufi institutions was instead *zawiyah* and in some Turkish regions under the Ottomans, where the adopted name was *tekke*. On visiting Cairo in 727 AH/ 1326 CE, Ibn Battuta (d. 771 AH/1369 CE) (1983), who was from Morocco, remarked that there were many Sufi institutions and establishments in the city. He called them *zawiyahs*, but commented that the people of Cairo called them *khanqahs*. He also said that the nobles vied with one another in building them. Generous endowments were also provided. Each of the *khanqahs* functioned like an educational institution. In each of them were Sufi personnel, mostly Persians, who were men of good education who were adepts in the Sufi doctrines. During Ibn Battuta's visit, Cairo was ruled by the Mamluks, who were known as avid supporters and benefactors of Sufism and Sufi institutions.

The rapid spread of institutionalised Sufism and its ubiquity in almost every phase of the Islamic cultural and civilisational presence in most of the geographical centres of Islam is evidenced by the fact that in 1256 AH/1840 CE, there were some 37 active *tariqahs* in Ottoman Istanbul alone, nineteen or twenty of which had an institutional presence. These *tariqahs* were represented by approximately three hundred *tekkes* or *khanqahs* that were distributed across the city and its adjacent villages. Istanbul's population at that time was approximately three-quarters of a million, ethnically and racially mixed; the greater number were Muslims and of these, most were likely affiliated with *tekkes*, either as dervishes or sympathisers (Lifchez 1992). Around the same time, there were said to be some two to three thousand *tekkes* in the provinces of Anatolia and Rumelia, which together formed the nucleus of the Ottoman Empire. As late as 1287 AH/1870 CE, registered resident dervishes or Sufis constituted one percent of the male Muslim population of Istanbul. What is more, according to some estimates, on the eve of World War I, there were approximately 60 thousand non-resident Sufi disciples or sympathisers in Istanbul, "which means that one in four of the city's male Muslim inhabitants was associated with a *tekke*" (Kreiser 1992).

Conclusion

The origins and rise of Sufism and Sufi institutions could be closely related to the institutionalisation and decentralisation of the multiple roles and functions of mosque institutions. At first, Sufism and the Sufis regarded mosques as their homes. But later, independent Sufi bodies and establishments commenced to shift from simple hermitages to complex and multipurpose institutions, catering to the exigencies of the growing and increasingly sophisticated Sufi fraternities and

guilds. The evolution of Sufi institutions, by and large, progressed through several primary phases. This evolution was marked firstly by the emergence of simple *duwayrahs*, which quickly evolved into *ribats* and the latter then developed into multifaceted *khanqahs*, which in most places became synonymous with institutionalised Sufism. This evolution with its milestones, however, is an approximate inference. It is neither exact nor inflexible, because the relative presence of both *duwayrahs* and *ribats* was still felt even after the emergence and spread of *khanqahs*. Furthermore, following the emergence and rapid spread of the *khanqah* institution throughout the Muslim world, linguistically it was not called such in every Muslim region, even though most people must have been familiar with the institution. The name *khanqah* might not have been as widespread in some provinces of the Muslim West, especially in North Africa, where the name for similar Sufi institutions was *zawiyah* instead and in some Turkish regions under the Ottomans where the adopted name was *tekke*.

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